

FollowUp On Quote Submitted By Pacatus - "It is not a sign of good health to be well adjusted to a sick society."

Post by "Cassius" of July 19, 2026 at 5:45 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

I would be surprised to see a clear statement that any type of pleasure is "non-sensory"

There's a significant amount of variation involved and not everyone states this explicitly, but we can start with the effect that the contextless assertion that the goal is 'absence of pain' does not imply that what is left is any kind of sensation at all. That's why Cicero was charging Epicurus with being inconsistent, because "absence of...." does not in any respect require or imply the presence of any feeling of pleasure of any kind. To a fair and neutral observer, "absence of pain" implies feeling nothing unless you combine it with the knowledge that there are only two feelings, pleasure and pain. But explaining that there are only two feelings and absence of one implies the presence of the other is conspicuously absent from most presentations of this issue, because that leaves those who advocate absence of pain as higher than pleasure right back in the same spot of defending the word they don't like - pleasure.

So any position which leaves "absence of pain" undefined is implicitly calling absence of pain non-sensory. Here are some examples of how that plays out:

On Cicero's Interpretation of Katastematic Pleasure in Epicurus

Mathew Wenham

The standard interpretation of the concept of katastematic pleasure in Epicurus has it referring to "static" states from which feeling is absent. We owe the prevalence of this interpretation to Cicero's account of Epicureanism in his *De Finibus Bonorum Et Malorum*. Cicero's account, in turn, is based on the Platonic theory of pleasure. The standard interpretation, when applied to principles of Epicurean hedonism, leads to fundamental contradictions in his theory. I claim that it is not Epicurus, but the standard interpretation that generates these errors because the latter construes pleasure in Epicurus according to an attitudinal theoretical framework, whilst the account of pleasure that emerges from Epicurean epistemology sees it as experiential.

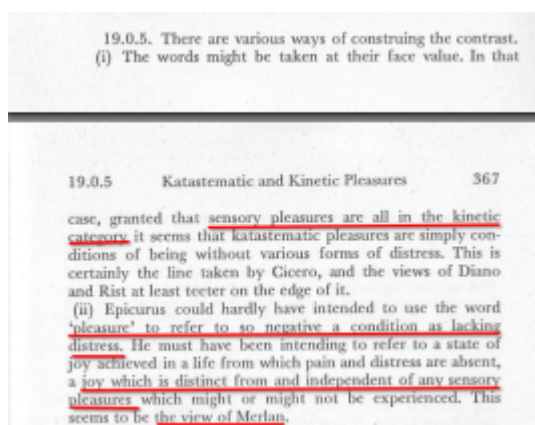
I believe that the interpretation committing Epicurus to this very fundamental error is mistaken. Now, in most cases, the misinterpretation of one philosopher by another would be largely inconsequential — we could merely uncover its errors and disregard it. But in this case, things are different. Cicero's interpretation, probably owing to the dearth of other ancient sources, has been inordinately influential. Even today, interpretations of Epicurus that include the rudiments of the Ciceronian account are standard. Jeffery Purinton's analysis of Epicurean pleasure in his article "Epicurus on the *Telos*" (1993) exemplifies the tendency to accept Cicero unchallenged. In the following passage Purinton adopts the Ciceronian notion that *katastematic* pleasure is *unfelt*, he writes: "...it is not necessarily the case that the mind will rejoice when it focuses on the presence of *painlessness* in the flesh. For the flesh does not report that this painless state is good...(*katastematic* pleasures) don't *feel* like anything" (1993:302) (author's italics). Purinton is consequently forced to construe *katastematic* pleasure as being wholly constituted by a *cognitive attitude* which appraises that condition as pleasant (1993:302). And, though he attempts to present a more sympathetic account of Epicurean hedonism than does Cicero, Purinton winds up with a similar set of problems and seeming contradictions.

What, then, constitutes an *attitudinal* theory of pleasure? Andrew Moore defines them as follows: "*Attitudinal* accounts claim that pleasure is an intentional state, such as a certain sort of belief or desire, directed at a feature of oneself or the wider world. It identifies pleasure with this attitude, not with its experiential object" (2004:9). It should be clear why the standard interpretation of Epicurean pleasure is an *attitudinal* account. In construing *katastematic* pleasure as an unfelt state of static painlessness, it becomes necessary that the basis of the state's pleasurable nature be identified with the attitude directed toward the painless experience. This is because, in the absence of feeling, no quality or property of the "motionless" experience could plausibly be identified as pleasure.⁸ Experiential accounts are diametrically opposed to attitudinal accounts. According to Moore, *experiential* accounts claim that "pleasure is a distinctive conscious experience or element in such experience" (2004:6). *Experiential* pleasure theories deny the possibility of *attitudinal* pleasures — such as the standard interpretation's *katastematic* pleasure — because, on this framework, pleasure is a quality belonging to the experience itself, and not the attitude directed

Conclusion

The standard/Ciceronian interpretation of *katastematic* pleasure looks to be mistaken. Cicero's Platonic assumptions in relation to pleasure lead him to interpret this condition as *bare, unfelt, painlessness*. This interpretation, when applied to Epicurean ethics, produces contradictions within his ethical system. Cicero, naturally, is comfortable with his own interpretation and he consequently rejects Epicurean hedonism as inconsistent. This would be hardly noteworthy were it not for the Ciceronian interpretation's profound influence on Epicurean scholarship in this

This issue is developed much more extensively by Gosling & Taylor in their chapter on *Katastematic and Kinetic pleasure*. Many of the academic writers - including Emily Austin and Kelly Aronsen - refer back to this for their analysis. If you *feel* the pleasure then it is kinetic.



19.0.6. As we have pointed out, all these views assume that the distinction between kinetic and katastematic pleasures was one on which Epicurus put a particular emphasis, and that they were different kinds of pleasure, the good in life consisting in some of the latter. It is this feature of all such views which creates the problems. These are as follows:

(i) It is agreed on all these views that the good is *ataraxia* and *aponia*, as distinct from sensory pleasures. But Epicurus is very insistent on the importance of sensory pleasures. This

Gosling and Taylor of course agree with your comment, Bryan, that it would be impossible to conceive of Epicurus holding "*that any type of pleasure is "non-sensory" - because that means the pleasure is not experienced at all - which is simply not possible.*" That is exactly why I am pushing this issue so hard, because this implication cannot be allowed to stand unchallenged.

So this issue is exactly the problem that comes from holding that katastematic pleasures are not sensory pleasure at all. The whole chapter which G&T devote to the issue goes through exactly this problem.

Here Epicurus is not just saying that sensory pleasures are a good thing, but that nothing is left to the good life if you subtract them. Indeed virtue and wisdom can only be praised if they are considered as a means to them and joy of mind is entirely dependent on them. Yet on any of the interpretations under consideration one would expect Epicurus to know perfectly well what would be left among the goods if sensory pleasures were subtracted: *ataraxia* and *aponia*. Since these are the good, the loss of the other pleasures would not be catastrophic: one would still have painlessness, joy, or the recognition of the absence of pain. Indeed, one would expect that virtue and wisdom would be shown valuable as productive as these, not of sensory pleasure. Yet these quotations are not isolated and all the ancient critics, admittedly hostile, got the impression that sensory pleasures loomed large in the ideal Epicurean life. So it looks as though at worst we have an inconsistency, at best a confusion into which Epicurus was perhaps led by polemical over-enthusiasm.